



# Transcultural and Imagological Figures: Disenchantment, Allophilia, and Belonging in Enrique Vila-Matas and Antonio Tabucchi

Maria João Simões

Antonio Tabucchi and Enrique Vila-Matas – the former an Italian, born in 1943, and the latter a Spaniard, born in 1948 – have in common the fact that they both lived through diverse multicultural experiences which they transposed into their works. They have in common the explicit acknowledgment that some of their life choices were routed by specific writers and literary works. Tabucchi traveled extensively throughout Europe purposely in search of the authors he had become familiar with in his uncle's library (see Tabucchi 2010:15). In Paris, he became acquainted with the works of Álvaro de Campos, one of the heteronyms of Fernando Pessoa, and was captivated by this poet's country and its culture. Pursuing this appeal, he decided to learn Portuguese and later to study Portuguese literature. Vila-Matas, on the other hand, escaped the franquist regime, and in seeking exile in Paris, strove to follow in the footsteps of Hemingway, who also lived in Paris and whose appearance he tried to emulate (Vila-Matas 2014: 3, 9, 35).

Both writers ingeniously translated their experiences into writings that combine fiction, biography and documentary, engaging readers in a game of great complicity rich in irony. These works consequently display not only what could be described as the authors' 'literary transnationalism', but also different impressions of the foreign countries that welcomed them, as well as their encounters with the natives who did not, making them feel alien and different.



This essay will focus on some of the imagological representations inspired by Tabucchi's and Vila-Matas' transnational experiences, identifying similarities and differences in the way these images are constructed and inferring the underlying themes and motifs in their respective fictions.

The autobiographical tendency in some of both authors' fictional works, shows that the roots of their displacements were different. Enrique Vila-Matas exiled himself in Paris due to political and personal reasons: he wanted to escape the claustrophobic atmosphere of his country and to prove himself an indubitable writer, therefore also proving himself worthy vis-à-vis his father with whom he had a somewhat complicated relationship — as he reveals in *Bartleby and Co* (2011: 5). Once arrived in Paris, he wished to follow in the footsteps of his idol, Hemingway, and lived for two years in an attic rented from Marguerite Duras. Though he kept his distance from the political fervour of exiled Spaniards, he did meet several of them, and he also socialized with exiled Latin-Americans. Tabucchi shared with Vila-Matas this cosmopolitan appeal and this passion for foreign lands inspired by literature. However, in his case, it was his passion for artists that drew him first to Paris and, later, to Portugal, where he met his wife. From then on, he lived half the year in Portugal and the other half in Italy, where he taught Portuguese literature.

The two authors can be perceived as personalities that internalized cultural experiences marked by cultural hybridism, allowing, thus, an approach oriented toward the unravelment of the cultural interchanges that inform transnational studies.

In fact, transnationalism (or transnationality<sup>1</sup>) can bring new light on those matters in accordance with Paul Jay's claims:

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<sup>1</sup> In order to emphasize both "processes of social connection and belonging", Nina Glick Schiller pleads for the term transnationality which can place "cities within the synergies and tensions of the mutual construction of the local, national and global". Moreover, she stresses that "to speak of transnationality and the city is to challenge the paradigms that underlie most urban research and public policy." (Schiller 2012: 23)

Since the rise of critical theory in the 1970s, nothing has reshaped literary and cultural studies more than its embrace of transnationalism. It has productively complicated the nationalist paradigm long dominant in these fields, transformed the nature of the locations we study, and focused our attention on forms of cultural production that take place in the liminal spaces between real and imagined borders. (Jay 2010: 1)

Tabucchi repeatedly recognizes his cross-border position and the inlayed permeability of cultures of his own works in several interviews<sup>2</sup> and presentations, namely in “Portrait d’un écrivain en miroir” (Tabucchi, 2007). In this text, he explains how much he is influenced by foreign paintings, films, photographs<sup>3</sup> and stories he heard from different people, and how all this shaped his fictions in an unconventional and fragmentary way — a feature particularly visible in *It’s Getting Later All the Time* (*Si stá facendo sempre piú tardi*). Tirelessly, Vilas-Matas also reveals to his readers how he is indebted to mixed cultural and literary influences, stressing, especially in *Never Any End to Paris* (*París no se acaba nunca*), how his exile in Paris contributes for those cultural interferences, all the more so because he was “forming part of a long line of generations of writers who had gone into exile” in the Latin Quarter and, in so doing, he was “embracing the order of those who are for ever foreign” (Vila-Matas 2014: 67). The fragmentary mode explored by both authors in their autobiographical fictions, in the midst of other contemporary writings, may have participated in what Paul Jay identifies as a welcome contest to uniformity:

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<sup>2</sup> A list of some the multiple interviews given by Tabucchi is presented in the official website [www.antoniotabucchi.it/](http://www.antoniotabucchi.it/) dedicated to the author.

<sup>3</sup> The importance of those artistic interchanges can also be perceived when Tabucchi explains, in the same text, how he insisted foreign publishers use a particular and unique photograph on the cover of his book *It’s Getting Later All the Time* (which is the same in all the editions in foreign languages).

One claim that is often made against the changes ushered in by the transnational turn in literary studies is that it has led to a debilitating fragmentation. Principles of coherence that have guided the field for decades have given way to a focus on pluralities, differences, hybrid identities, and complicated transnational geographies that are seemingly incoherent and unmanageable. I do not agree, because I believe that literary studies as a field has always *thrived* on fragmentation and challenges to coherence. (Jay 2010: 3)

The two authors' experiences illustrate a new cultural reality that could be called, following Stephen Greenblatt's claims, a "cultural wandering": the cultural flow of writers and men of letters who enjoy a variety of cultural experiences – through grants, experiences abroad, such as Writers in Residence programmes, and voluntary cultural delocalization. In fact, according to Greenblatt (2010: 251), mobility studies should take into account, not only the traditional forms of movement, marked as "serious", but also "others, such as tourism, theatre festivals" which "are rendered virtually invisible". Although these situations – and those experienced by the two writers – are not without historical antecedents, they go beyond the traditional attraction of artists for cities known for their artistic ambiance and creative freedom. This difference is acutely perceived by Vila-Matas when he describes the artist Cozarinsky:

I went to the cinema a lot and Edgardo Cozarinsky must have gone a lot too, as I often found him watching the same film as me. Cozarinsky, a late Borgesian according to Susan Sontag, was an Argentinian exile who seemed to have ended up feeling comfortable in the role of outsider. A writer and a film-maker, he lived between Paris and London [...]. I admired him because he knew how to combine two cities, two artistic allegiances [...]; until I arrived in Paris, it had never occurred to me that one could live in two cities at the same time [...]. Ten years after I left Paris, I specially admire his book *Urban Voodoo*, an exile's book, a transnational book, employing a hybrid structure very innovative in those days that has

since become more established in literature (Vila-Matas 2014: 112-3).

Pondering the liminal position of the Argentinian film-maker, Villa-Matas notices that the roots of the hybridity exhibited in his work lay precisely in the core of his own experience, allowing him to create a fictional work of mixed cultural ambiances — a transnational book, as he called it himself. Furthermore, Vila-Matas also insinuates that his own situation bears a true resemblance with the exiled companion, suggesting that the same transnational features could be applied to his own book. In some aspects, the hybrid structure associated with *Urban Voodoo*<sup>4</sup> can also be detected in *Never any End to Paris* (*Paris no se acaba nunca*), namely in its mixture of documentary novel and fictitious autobiographical lecture. In other words, elements of self-fiction and memoirs are interwoven with elements of documentary tone, inasmuch as the narrative of the learning years of the young Vila-Matas (a sort of *bildungsroman*) is interspersed with the narrative of Hemingway's life and the portrayal of the 'lost generation'<sup>5</sup> (which is one of the leading topics of this work). This textual appropriation oscillates between parody, *pastiche* and quotation, in a composition that either combines both embedding and alternation, or that explores the *mise en abyme*

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<sup>4</sup> Configuring a protagonist (Edgardo Cozarinsky) modelled on the author *Urban Voodoo* also stands as a memory log. The main character is a well-known artist who finds himself in Paris with no money to pay the rent, just like Vila-Matas. Susan Sontag sees this novel as a "tratado do exilado", "cosmopolita y por lo tanto transnacional", in its medley of languages and genres. In his turn, F. Cabrera Infante suggests that Cozarinsky, talking about a lost Buenos Aires and other cities, in letters or in imaged postcards, written from Paris, in the second paratext of the work, "escogió el exilio como forma geográfica de la nostalgia". It is not surprising, therefore, that the author of *Never Any End to Paris* greatly admires this work, one more to have greatly inspired him.

<sup>5</sup> The expression «lost generation» may have been coined by Gertrud Stein, as Vila-Matas (2014: 160) explains based on Hemingway's *A Moveable Feast*.

technique, for the author keeps finding similarities between episodes and scenes of his own life and episodes narrated by Hemingway or by other artists.

Another point of comparison can be found in the resemblance between the characteristics underlined by Vila-Matas in the lifestyle of the Argentinian artist and certain aspects of Tabucchi's life, as the Italian writer also lived in between two cities. Moreover, the admiration of the hybrid structure inscribed in the book of the Argentinian writer is similar to the appreciation made by Vila-Matas a Tabucchi's book about *Donna di Porto Pim*, which is an example, for him of "border book": an "inquisitive contraption of tales, memoir fragments [...], maps [...], pieces of an islander woman story [...], all transformed by a firm literary will in a pure fiction." (Vila-Matas 2011). In fact, some of Tabucchi's books are also characterized by the use of a strong subjective space as the starting point for narratives of fictional or invented memories, namely in *It's Getting Later All the Time*. This novel is constructed with several feigned letters sent from many different locations, such as Italy, Greece, London, and others places, while spatial references are even more diversified, from Abyssinia to Brazil and the Americas, among others, most of which result from the author's own life experiences. Moreover, the stories of love encounters and ruptures are brought about, or permeated, by literary and artistic references.

These aspects can be clearly seen in the third letter, entitled "Forbidden games". Echoing the author's real life experience, the sender of the letter wanders through the streets of Paris, and recalls his earlier life there: the route to the Cité Universitaire, at night, after the theatre shows, the Buñuel films, the jazz clubs ("caveaux") of Saint Germain and the musical anarchism of Boris Vian – showing that, like Vila-Matas, his nostalgic feelings are filled with literary recollections. This short text is full of allusions, and references to, philosophers, writers and artists, as well as works equally mentioned by Vila-Matas, thus showing that the Paris experiences of both authors shared common references.

Concerning the strategies adopted by Tabucchi to convey the cosmopolitanism and contemporaneity of his artistic experiences, one other aspect that should be pointed out is the self-reflexivity of his

writing, which demystifies the very processes of fictional construction. This can be observed, for example, in the book *Si sta facendo sempre più tarde* that adopts an epistolary style, but, here and there, also deconstructs this discursive genre through irony and other stylistic devices, such as the impersonation of a scientific element — the hemoglobin — when the narrator unusually and ironically starts the letter with the sentence “My dear beloved Hemoglobin” (Tabucchi 2006: 56) .

Also, in the epistle, under the English title of “Forbidden games”, the author jokingly explains to his girlfriend (who has left him) “what a novel is”, offering her “a summary” of a “hypothetical novel”, which could be interpreted as «let’s say, a small contraption of the do-it-yourself», urging her to learn more about “narrative structures”, about the choice of a homodiegetic or a heterodiegetic narrator and, even more, challenging her to complete the plot by filling in the gaps and blank spaces of the story (Tabucchi 2001: 48). On the other hand, in “Strange Way to Live”, Tabucchi deconstructs the fictional strategy of a supposed found book, often used in literature, and playfully demystifies its verisimilitude through a process of *mise en abyme* concerning the motives that trigger the literary creation. The letter is a veiled tribute to Vila-Matas: it alludes to and reinvents the steps taken by some characters of Vila-Matas’ book *El viaje vertical*, thus interpolating their stories with some personal references concerning Vila-Matas’ own fragmentary, personal ideas. The title of the letter, in its turn, alludes to another Vila-Matas’ book, entitled *Extraña Forma de Vida*, a title that is also picked up in another title, this time from an LP record of Amalia Rodrigues whose cover had captivated Vila-Matas. These gimmicks force readers to unfold all the superposed layers of references presented like Chinese boxes. But, as Bruno Ferraro (2001: 59) stresses, “it is precisely the intricate web leading to the creation of the stories, the fragments and the characters in them that intrigues the readers of Tabucchi’s texts”, urging them to search for an interpretation, not unlike a game of reverse game played with meanings. Other strategies used in this text are, on the one hand, the deconstruction of the author/narrator’s omniscience, by presenting a lack of full knowledge about the characters

and, on the other hand, the break of temporal linearity of the narrative and possible facts, visible in this sentence:

And that book by an author who had already foreseen everything about you, your itinerary, your path, made you think that maybe you were pursuing your future and at the same time it made you reacquire the meaning of what you had lost: it is your vertical journey; in its veritable, implacable and unwitting end, on the contrary, it is as if your journey had shifted to the horizontal: it's true!, it's true, you are in movement, and time passes through you, your future is looking for you, it finds you, it is living you: it has already lived you. (Tabucchi 2006: 170)

Self-reflexivity is also continuously present in *Never Any End to Paris*, writing being one of the main, if not the main theme of this novel, given that this work resorts to the characteristics of the *bildungsroman* to construct an ironic novel on a young writer's apprenticeship. Given the chance of renting his apartment from the feared and admired writer Marguerite Duras, whose advice he timidly seeks, many of his thoughts turn around the thirteen instructive points highlighted by Duras to achieve a good, solid and captivating work of art, that functions like a recipe:

1. Structural problems. 2. Unity and harmony. 3. Plot and story.
- 4 Time. 5. Textual effects. 6. Verisimilitude. 7. Narrative technique.
8. Characters. 9. Dialogue. 10. Setting(s). 11. Style. 12. Experience.
13. Linguistic register. (Vila-Matas 2014: 21)

In terms of imagological configuration, both authors weave images of Paris imbued in the fascination and admiration typical of youth (here configured as a time impregnated by intense cultural and artistic learning). However, while those images are conveyed, the reader is purposefully reminded of how the critical detachment of later years is inscribed in it. But, foreign national imagotypes are also built upon cultural stereotypes belonging to the different social groups of a given



country (Beller 2000). With the intricate interplay between the past(s) and present of this autobiographical text, Vila-Matas plays with old images of cultural groups and jokingly reminds readers of his young literary options, as when he remembers hearing about a literary meeting — “an OuLiPo (Ouvroir de Littérature Potentielle) meeting” — and remembers wondering whether he should go or not:

*Oulipians, pataphysicists, situationists...* I thought the most prudent thing would be to carry on being a situationist, though not a practising one. I wasn't in the mood for too many new adventures. But I had to admit that Paris was so full of surprises that there was never any end to them. (Vila-Matas 2011: 149)

Tabucchi also plays with time differences as when he ironically refers to his youth. An example of this strategy is the jocular recollection of his naïve belonging to a sort of “coffee shop existentialism” – a theoretical leftism rather than a leftism of real engagement. And thus (also exploring the backward look allowed by the autobiographical register) his images of Paris, which convey the admiration and fascination he feels for the city and reveal his enduring allophilia for French culture, are joined by more critical and disenchanted images, like the one showing how in Parisian cafés, contemporary students prefer American to French songs (2006: 54). In contrast with the disenchantment, he witnesses the gesture of a Frenchman who opts for a sentimental chanson by Charles Trenet. If, at first, Tabucchi identifies him as a native of Auvergne,<sup>6</sup> stressing how his physical description conforms to the regional stereotype – a short, stocky man with a typically French face –, but, soon after, the stereotypical perspective is broken, on the psychological and emotional levels, because the author identifies himself with this common man, sharing his old-fashioned and

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<sup>6</sup> In this reference to a man from Auvergne, there may be some echoes of the verses of the well-known «Chanson de l'Auvergnat» by Georges Brassens, which deconstructs the stereotype of the “Auvergnat” as stingy, and underlies the capacity to understand and to be sympathetic with the foreigner.

generational taste in music and felling close to him through it. In this sense and following the writer's thoughts and moves, the reader can perceive either the stereotypes or their deconstruction.

In the author's recollection of young experiences, the emphasis is laid on the interculturality induced by social interaction at the Cité Universitaire, which is illustrated by the friendship between the protagonist and some Japanese students, among whom he recalls a medical student who used to sing Puccini's *Madama Butterfly*. Tabucchi thus goes beyond stereotypes, as the hetero-images created in this work are very complex because the 'other' they portray presents multiple facets and is sometimes idealized and sometimes criticized. This complexity highlights the challenges imagological studies must face nowadays since, according to Manfred Beller and Joep Leerssen (2007: 432-33), if "literary imagology deals with attitudes and judgments as fixed in texts", its main objectives are to examine, interpret and demystify them. As Beller stresses that not only "mutual relations between nations are a social given", but also "the artistic invocation, articulation and instrumentalization of national themes and figures is a given" and, being as it is, the imagological approach has the important task of uncloaking the processes leading to prejudicial images. Moreover, it will have to deal with new ways to interpret national identity, since this can no longer be understood as an impervious or static concept.

It is precisely a different way of being in the world and of perceiving the relationship with national characteristics that these works depict, demonstrating that the two authors are permeable to the 'other' and to his/her cultural difference, thereby transforming the 'I' and its own identity in a dynamic way. In fact, according to Levinas, the conceptualization of alterity implies understanding the 'ipseity' (or selfhood) of the 'other', of what characterises him/her, as well as the acceptance of the changes it causes in the 'I':

To be I is, over and beyond any individuation that can be derived from a system of references, to have identity as one's content. The *I* is not a being that always remains the same, but is the being whose

existing consists in identifying itself, in recovering its identity throughout all that happens to him. He is the primal identity, the primordial work of identification. The *I* is identical in its very alterations. He represents them to himself and thinks them. [...] The soul [...], to be sure, dwells in what is not itself, but it acquires its own identity by this dwelling in the 'other' (and not logically, by opposition to the other). (Levinas 1991: 36, 115)

This identity process –which includes psychological and sociological elements –can be observed in Tabucchi's "Forbidden games". In this text, the author embraces French culture, and exposes every episode to a French spatial and temporal contextualization. Moreover, he includes a letter written in French in the original Italian publication.

This incorporation of the language of the 'other', which underlines his "dwelling in the 'other'", to use Levinas' term, is even more profound and extensive in his novel *Requiem*, originally published in Portuguese, a proof of his strong lusophilia. The intensity of this work is matched by Vila-Matas' *Dublinesque*, where the author's fascination with Joyce's Dublin is depicted. The two novels are homages to writers and to these writers' connexion with a city: Fernando Pessoa's Lisbon and James Joyce's Dublin.

If in *Never Any End to Paris* admiration becomes a sort of "manie" (the term used by Daniel-Henri Pageaux in contrast with "phobie"<sup>7</sup>), in *Dublinesque* epithets such as adoration or veneration are more adequate<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> Pageaux (1989: 157) differentiates between three types of fundamental figurations, "phobie", "manie", "philie", considering them the main distinctions concerning the establishment of imagological relationships.

<sup>8</sup> Stressing the complexity of the relationships with the 'other', in an introduction of a book on Imagology, I proposed a two-entry table combining different types of relationship (with the 'other') with several degrees of emotional commitment. This table is followed by a diagram representing the nuances and recursive complexity of these combinations, where the multiple and dynamic features of the relationships with the 'other' is clarified. (Simões 2011: 45).

In this novel, fascination and veneration indeed drive the characters' behaviour, since its protagonist, Samuel Riba, a retired editor, wishes to recreate and relive the experiences of the main characters in Joyce's *Ulysses*. He even tries to understand the obscure and mysterious "man in a *mackintosh*" seen by Joyce's protagonist, Bloom (Vila-Matas 2013: 98). Beyond Samuel Riba's attitudes, however, the reader can feel the veneration of his creator towards Joyce's work, similar to the Tabucchi's veneration of poet Fernando Pessoa.

In *Never Any End to Paris*, Vila-Matas recreates the image of Paris as a capital city, artistic and cosmopolitan, in contrast with its Latino-American counterparts, crushed under the weight of dictatorship, and with the self-image of a provincial, bourgeois and enclosed Barcelona. However, if Paris is portrayed as the city of artists,<sup>9</sup> welcoming and liberating, it can also be intimidating in its elegance. Undoubtedly, the value placed on success here can be overwhelming, and its intellectual trends can be elitist or hermetic: Roland Barthes, Philippe Sollers, Julia Kristeva, and other thinkers of *Tel Quel*, are seen from a great distance by the bashful Vila-Matas. As young writer, he is flabbergasted when he discovers the exotic destinations they are invited to (Vila-Matas 2001: 57), or when he reads Jacques Lacan's cryptic comments on Marguerite Duras (*ibid.*: 185). In different ways, they are all part of the inaccessible glamour of Paris, which is ironically portrayed by the mature author while it had induced feelings of despair and isolation in the young, then unknown writer.

Regarding Tabucchi's imagotypes, although he creates positive hetero-images of cities like Paris or Oporto, he does not avoid less

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<sup>9</sup> Paris is such a welcoming city that the Valencian concierge of the building where the penniless Vila-Matas rents an attic acts more like a concierge than as a Catalan fellow citizen, in the eyes of the anxious young aspiring writer. According to the narrator, the concierge's perspective is clearly determined by her professional status, with a tendency to stereotype the tenants, thus showing that her sense of identity with the homeland is mitigated by the process of acculturation. Underlying all of this, one feels the fragmented identities of a forcibly unified Spain.

flattering images of Portugal and of its colonial past. He does not ignore the effects of this oppression on present-day Portugal either –something which is evoked by a street vendor in Oporto singing a ballad in Creole by the Cape Verdean singer Cesária Évora:

Na ausência e na distância,<sup>10</sup> sings a voice on the street, and immediately after comes the cry: laranjas, laranjas! It is necessary to shift from childhood to the categories of the present, dawn is peeping in at the window, and a street vendor has learned a song by Cesária Évora: Africa, which Portugal conquered with arms and ships before bringing on the civilization of Christ, the tong of the West, and slavery, now returns like a nemesis [...]. She sings Africa, ah, Africa that I have never known, Africa the mother, Africa the womb, Africa that my Europe has raped for centuries, Africa the immense, poor, sick yet still cheerful [...]. (Tabucchi 2011: 169)

The poignant criticism embedded in Tabucchi's perspective draws a negative hetero-image of Portugal due to its colonial past, and also a negative auto-image, since the author extends his criticism to Europe with an acute sense and awareness of belonging to it.

Beyond the recurring theme of literary writing (displayed in these but also in other works by Vila-Matas and Tabucchi), there are others themes common to both authors. Directly or indirectly, like many others of their generation, both deal with the Spanish Civil War, as well as with the question of censorship and abuse in dictatorships. In Vila-Matas' work, these subjects recur both implicitly and explicitly through the references to Hemingway, whose life and work are closely tied with Spanish events, and through the process of emulation, the narrator tries to follow in the steps of his idol (this being one of the conductive theme of Vila-Matas' book). This is particularly noticeable in the recreation of the episode of the storming of the Hotel Ritz during the occupation, when Hemingway confronted Malraux, after he felt the latter had

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<sup>10</sup> In the Italian original text, these few words "In absence and in distance" appear in Portuguese.

abandoned the Republican cause in the Spanish Civil War (Vila-Matas 2014: 117).

This Civil War is also thematically present in Tabucchi's novel *Afirma Pereira* (*Pereira Mantains*), about a period in the life of a journalist, a melancholic and naïve widower who gradually becomes aware of the injustices brought about by Salazar's dictatorship in Portugal. He is cured of his earlier abulia as he starts to help a Portuguese young man, an orphan who lost his Italian father and Portuguese mother and is involved in the resistance movement. With his girlfriend, Marta, and his cousin, Bruno Rossi, a typographer, Monteiro Rossi travels to the Alentejo, in Southern Portugal, to recruit fighters for the Spanish republican cause, which will eventually cost him his life at the hands of PIDE, the Portuguese secret police.

In this novel, history is reconstructed with plenty of literary references, highlighting the stance of intellectuals and writers on political causes:

Well, said Father António, it all began with the Basque clergy, because after the bombing of Guernica the Basque clergy [...] took sides with the Republic. [...] In the Spring [...] two famous French Catholic writers, Francois Mauriac and Jacques Maritain, published a manifesto in defence of the Basques. [...] The problem was complicated by the Vatican, which claimed that thousands of the Spanish clergy had been killed by the republicans, and that the Basque Catholics were "Red Christians" and deserved to be excommunicated [...], and to make matters worse Claudel [...], a Catholic writer himself, wrote an ode "Aux Martyrs Espagnols" as the preface in verse to a swinish propaganda leaflet produced by a Spanish nationalist agent in Paris. (Tabucchi 2011: 132-133)

Thus does Tabucchi reconfigure some of the events leading to the Civil War, providing different group imagotypes: religious, political and cultural groups, and showing the entangled relationships between them.

This work by Tabucchi is also a real indictment of the explicit forms of censorship typical of authoritarian regimes, but also of the one exercised by democratic regimes through corruption and demagoguery. This was the reason for the book's great impact in Berlusconi's Italy. The intelligentsia, in opposition, singled out this novel as an example of the fight against censorship, comparing the old Portuguese censorship with the current Berlusconi rule. Although the novel may have been used for specific political purposes, it nevertheless shows the potential of the literary work for universality. The author thus inserts a dark period of Portuguese history in the wider European political game, exposing the connections between Franco and Salazar, as well as the support Franco received from Mussolini and from Germany (Tabucchi 2011: 142).

Both Tabucchi's and Vila-Matas' works demonstrate how, while a novel may start from an intense interest in one culture, acquired from a young age and by living abroad, it can also comment with great insight on more worldwide matters. Both authors excel in forming hetero-images through many cultural references –as seen in Tabucchi's *Pereira Mantains*, and in Vila-Matas' *Never Any End to Paris*. Interestingly, at the end of *It's Getting Later All the Time*, Tabucchi confirms the pertinence of the narratives strategies' comparison in both authors when he adds a postscript with information on his sources, on the people<sup>11</sup> and on the episodes that inspired the various letters. In his explanation of the circumstances that propelled him to write the letter "Strange Way to live", he makes an explicit homage to the Spanish author, at the same time confirming his own way of capturing cultural relationships in order to picture them in his complex and entangled fictions: "'Strange Way to Live' takes its title from an old *fado* by Amália Rodrigues, and can be

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<sup>11</sup> According to Tabucchi, the "text "What's the Use of a Harp with Only One String?" owes much to the memory of a friend who departed one day for his own Elsewhere without coming back, to a brief encounter with the representative of the Jewish Community of Salonika, to the pianist Sandro Ivo Bartoli, with whom it is nice to talk about music, and to a person who once talked to me about the remote past of Alexandria". (Tabucchi 2011: 231)

read as a tribute to Enrique Vila-Matas and to the anthropophagic brilliance of his work.” (Tabucchi 2011: 231)<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> About those anthropophagic fictions, Tabucchi explains himself stressing that “he was not a robber, but only a good listener” — « Là je n’ai pas été un voleur, j’ai simplement été à l’écoute » (Tabucchi 2007).



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## The author

### Maria João Simões

Maria João Simões is PhD Professor of the Department of Languages, Literatures and Cultures at the Faculty of Humanities - Universidade of Coimbra (Portugal). Main subjects of research: Portuguese literature, comparative literatura, imagology, literary transnationalism and

Realism. Membre of Executif Committee of the portuguese research centre “Centro de Literatura Portuguesa”. Coordinator of the ongoing project “Literature, Imagology and Transnationalism: Representation of Migrations”. Coordinator of a project, completed in 2011, with results has published in the volume *Imagotipos Literários: Processos de (Des)Configuração na Imagologia Literária* (2011). Publications: “Imagology and Relational Complexity: The Group Stereotype” , in Coutinho, Eduardo F. (ed.) *Beyond Binarisms. Discontinuities and Displacements: Studies in Comparative Literature*, (2009). Editor of the volumes *O Grotesco*, 2005; *O Fantástico*, 2007; co-editor of the volume *O Século do Romance. Realismo e Naturalismo na Ficção Oitocentista* (2013).

**Email:** mjsimoes@fl.uc.pt

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